

## INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY WITHIN THE EVOLVING WORLD ORDER

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### Abstract:

*Indian foreign policy within the evolving world order is a dynamic mix of realism, strategic autonomy, and civilizational ethos. While the liberal international order disintegrates and multipolarity gains root, India is not just adjusting - it is moulding the shape of the new global architecture. By reconciling hard power and soft influence, and national interest and global responsibility, India is rising as a decisive factor in the world order of the 21st century. The international system is in the midst of seismic changes. The emergence of multipolarity, the erosion of Western dominance, the return of nationalism, and the rise of new power poles have combined to upset the post-Cold War liberal world order. In this changing scenario, India's foreign policy has shifted from Nehruvian idealism to strategic pragmatism, establishing itself as a major player in international governance.*

**Keywords:** *peaceful co-existence, non-alignment, anti-colonial, tariff.*

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### Introduction:

Foreign policy of every nation is connected with the history of the Nation. India's foreign policy is also connected with history and freedom movement. As a legacy of history, India's foreign policy of the present day involves much of the facts which earlier emerged from the Indian freedom struggle. The concept of world peace and peaceful co-existence is the outcome of thinking which was thousands of years ago and presented by such thinkers as Mahatma Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi. Likewise, the resistance to the policy of imperialism, colonialism and apartheid in India's foreign policy is the outcome of the great national movement. Even in the ancient period, India has established commercial, cultural and religious contacts with the entire world. As time passed by, there used to be a different king in different areas of India, the nature of India also kept on changing, but India's relations at the world level remained always. Discussing strategic relations, the expertise of India is that it has never been offensive. India maintains formal diplomatic relations with the majority of the nations.

It is the world's second largest country based on population. India is also the world's largest democratic country and its economy is one of the world's emerging economies. Since independence, India has had friendly relations with the majority of the nations. India has always been very active globally. India has impacted the world economically since 1990. India has kept its strength and has been doing its best to ensure world peace. India's relationship with Pakistan and China is a bit tense, but otherwise, India has deep defense relations with Israel and France.



### **Changing Word Order:**

Today's international system is facing revolutionary changes characterized by changing power dynamics, technological advancements, economic interconnectedness, climate imperatives, and geopolitical rivalries' re-emergence. The relative decline of the United States, China's emergence, Russia's assertiveness, and the rebalancing of international institutions have all combined to generate what scholars characterize as a "changing world order." Amidst this dynamic context, foreign policy in India has gained a new significance. As the world's largest democracy, the fifth-largest economy, and a major Indo-Pacific power, India is forced to remake its diplomatic approaches while protecting its fundamental national interests.

### **Historical Precepts of Indian Foreign Policy:**

At independence in 1947, Indian foreign policy was informed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's vision, based on non-alignment, anti-colonial solidarity, and moral diplomacy. Nehru aimed to achieve strategic autonomy through avoiding involvement in Cold War blocs while furthering peaceful co-existence, economic development, and South-South cooperation. India had a challenging middle path to walk between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. While in its non-aligned stance, India strengthened its relations with Moscow to the point of signing the 1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation, which turned out to be vital during the Bangladesh Liberation War. Meanwhile, India continued to engage the West, specifically for technologies and investments. The collapse of the Soviet Union compelled India to redefine its external relations. Economic liberalization in 1991 imposed new imperatives, calling for increased interaction with the United States, the European Union, and East Asia. India's Look East Policy, launched in the 1990s, was an acknowledgement of the growing centrality of Asia.

### **India and the Major Powers :**

#### **India and the United States**

The bilateral relationship between India and the United States has transformed considerably over the last few decades, characterized by strategic alliances, economic engagement, and regional security cooperation. Donald Trump's election in 2016 brought about a new style of U.S. foreign policy that is more transactional and focused on "America First." This had deep implications for India, and it made the country re-think its foreign policy strategies and diplomatic relationships. While India managed its relationship with a transformed U.S. administration, it sought to strengthen its own geopolitical position while counterbalancing regional issues, especially those with China and Pakistan.

At the beginning of Trump's second term in January 2025, there was expectation that bilateral relations would continue on a positive note. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the fourth world leader to travel to Washington after Trump's inauguration and both leaders were populists and economic nationalists who had similar worldviews. New Delhi ignored the Trump administration's crackdown on illegal and legal immigration into the US, with Indian nationals being a top source of both. Existing friction over trade was also eased by India's offers to buy more American products to address the trade imbalance, with a target to more than double bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030. However, an expected interim trade agreement has not yet materialized.



This is partly due to New Delhi's entrenched protectionism, particularly in relation to its politically sensitive agricultural sector that employs over 40 per cent of the country's workforce, coupled with cultural sensitivities over the import of GM crops and animal by-product animal feed. Trump's social media post claiming that India is a 'dead' economy that does 'very little businesses with the US has added further bad blood.

Through late 2025, the U.S. imposed a 50% tariff on most imported goods from India, a sharp escalation in trade. The hike was implemented in two stages and was driven by geopolitical tensions. Once again, US President Donald Trump's declaration of a 100% duty on imported "branded and patented pharma products" has shaken the international pharma industry, albeit Indian generic drug manufacturers are seen to remain generally untouched for the time being. The latest cause of tension comes at the time of Trump making an attempt to arrange a truce in Ukraine. India, as the second-largest buyer of Russian crude - which represents almost 40 per cent of the country's total imports - has been caught in the crossfire. Washington had initially appeared willing to overlook New Delhi's purchase of discounted Russian crude, given India's needs as a major oil importer. The Trump administration's initially soft stance towards Moscow also had hopes of Russia-India relations becoming a lesser concern for Washington. This has changed now with Trump's recent tariffs, which New Delhi labelled as 'unfair, unjustified and unreasonable'. The fact that China and Turkey are equally among the largest buyers of Russian oil has lent credence to claims that India is being selectively targeted. India maintains that its close alignment with Moscow is not a vote of approval for Russian actions in Ukraine and that its reliance on Russian crude has stabilized global oil prices. Other matters have also fuelled tensions. New Delhi has rebuffed Trump's repeated assertions that he assisted in brokering a ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan after their four-day clash in May. Whereas Islamabad parroted the US line, New Delhi instead contends fighting stopped short of the intervention of third parties (consistent with India's long-standing stance not to internationalize the conflict and the issue of Kashmir). The US has also welcomed Pakistan's army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir twice since the fighting while Trump proclaimed a trade agreement with Islamabad.

### **India - Russia Relations**

Russia continues to be an important defense partner, providing more than 60 percent of India's military equipment. Historical relationship, cooperation in technology, and convergence in multilateral platforms underpin the partnership. Yet, Russia's increasing reliance on China and the sanctions regime by the West make India's balancing act complicated. The Ukraine war showcased India's dilemma: abstaining from anti-Russia motions while also highlighting dialogue and respect for sovereignty. This mirrors India's complex diplomacy in coping with contradictions. Reaffirming strategic autonomy New Delhi is once again reaffirming its deep-rooted commitment to strategic autonomy in its foreign policy. This involves approaching all leading nations and blocs, including those with which the US and West have traditionally tricky relations. During a visit to Russia, India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval referred to New Delhi's relations with Moscow as an 'old strategic and privileged partnership' that has a 'very special role'. But India has been seeking to reduce its economic dependence on Russia for some time by diversifying its oil supply and reducing its dependence on Russian military hardware. US pressure will speed up these efforts, as it was the Trump's re-imposition of

sanctions against Iran during his first term that led to New Delhi stopping Iranian crude imports. Nevertheless, some face-saving gesture might be essential since India does not wish to be accused of acting under compulsion.

### **India - China Relations**

India's relationship with China is one of co-operation and contestation. Two-way trade is more than \$100 billion a year, but outstanding border conflicts, especially in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, create recurring tensions. The 2020 Galwan Valley confrontation highlighted the sensitivity of the relationship and increased Indian distrust of Chinese strategic motives. India regards China's BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) as a threat to sovereignty, especially the China - Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) across disputed Kashmir. As such, India has attempted to balance China by means of the QUAD, increased Indo-Pacific co-operation, and infrastructure development with like-minded nations. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi attended the 25th Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Meeting, which was held in Tianjin, China, from 31 August to 1 September 2025.

### **India - European Union Relations**

The European Union maintains its position as India's third-largest trade partner and largest source of investment. Commonalities in values of democracy, climate action, and multilateralism define the relationship. The EU - India Connectivity Partnership (2021) and the FTA negotiation reflect intensifying engagement. However, differences in views on human rights and digital governance sometimes create tension.

### **“Neighbourhood First” Policy**

India's geographical neighbourhood continues to remain at the core of its foreign policy. Under the “Neighbourhood First” policy, India intends to push stability, connectivity, and cooperation with South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) nations. India's relations with its neighbours are complicated, plagued with issues like China's increasing presence and political instability in nations like Myanmar and Afghanistan, Regime changes in Bangladesh, Maldives & Nepal. In spite of these shortcomings, India follows its “Neighbourhood First” doctrine by initiatives such as regional cooperation in BIMSTEC and bilateral partnership with nations such as Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka.

### **Conclusion :**

Indian foreign policy in the evolving world order is a combination of continuity and change. Although the doctrine of strategic autonomy remains, its modern expression is pragmatic, flexible, and multi-vectoral. India's engagement with the outside world aims to capitalize on partnerships without sacrificing autonomy, characterized both by realist pragmatism and normative ideals. While great power shifts quicken in pace around the world, India's challenge will be to balance developmental needs with strategic rivalry, keep great power equilibrium intact, and exert leadership on global concerns. Achievement of this task will not just define India's international status but also help determine the destiny of the multipolar order itself. India's foreign policy evolves from historic non-align to clever multi-ties, suiting the untamed world order. It retains central freedom while pursuing neighbour peace and Indo-Pacific tranquillity. Spearheading the global south boosts its voice

against large rivalries. Against this backdrop, India's foreign policy has to balance great power competition, economic necessity, and domestic development priorities. India's international policy remains based on the doctrine of strategic autonomy. This calls for evading permanent alignment but creating something akin to flexible alliances. In contrast to the Cold War period, when non-alignment had been synonymous with equidistance, modern strategic autonomy permits selective interaction with rival blocs. For example, India is a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) with the U.S., Japan, and Australia, and at the same time, also a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) with China and Russia. Such pragmatic thinking is India's acknowledgment that ideological rigidity cannot keep pace with the nuance of a multipolar world. Strategic autonomy allows India's decisions to be driven by national interest and not compulsion.

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